

# Imagining Hell: Genshin's Vision of the Buddhist Hells as found in the *Ōjōyōshū*

ROBERT F. RHODES

**G**ENSHIN 源信 (942–1017; also known as Eshin Sōzu 惠心僧都, or Bishop of the Eshin Cloister) is well known to students of Japanese religions as the author of the *Ōjōyōshū* 往生要集, a seminal work in the history of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan.<sup>1</sup> In this work, Genshin presents a comprehensive outline of Pure Land cosmology and practice. This three fascicle treatise is divided into the following ten chapters:

- (1) Loathing the Defiled Realm (*onri edo* 厭離穢土)
- (2) Longing for the Pure Land (*gongu jōdo* 欣求淨土)
- (3) Authorities for the Pure Land (*gokuraku shōko* 極樂証拠)
- (4) Proper Practice of Nembutsu (*shōshū nembutsu* 正修念仏)
- (5) Aids to Nembutsu (*jonen hōhō* 助念方法)
- (6) Nembutsu for Special Occasions (*betsuji nembutsu* 別時念仏)
- (7) Benefits of Nembutsu (*nembutsu riyaku* 念仏利益)
- (8) Authorities for Nembutsu (*nembutsu shōko* 念仏証拠)

\* This is a slightly revised version of a paper originally published in *Shinshū Sōgō Kenkyūsho Kenkyū Kiyō* 真宗総合研究所研究紀要 15 (1998). We wish to thank this journal for permission to reprint it here.

<sup>1</sup> All references to the *Ōjōyōshū* will be made to the edition found in the *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經 (hereafter abbreviated as T, followed by volume and page numbers. The letters a, b, and c refer to the top, middle, and bottom columns of each page). Among the many Japanese works on the *Ōjōyōshū*, Ishida Mizumaro's 石田瑞麿 *Genshin* (Nihon shisō taikai vol. 6. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970) is outstanding. My paper is heavily indebted to this study, in particular to its copious annotation.

(9) Sundry Practices for Birth (*ōjō shogyō* 往生諸業)

(10) Interpretation of Problems (*mondō ryōken* 問答料簡)

In the first two chapters, Genshin sets forth a “map” of the Buddhist spiritual universe from the perspective of Pure Land Buddhism. The first chapter, “Loathing the Defiled Realm,” takes up the Six Paths (*rokudō* 六道) or the realms of transmigratory existence and describes in great detail the suffering encountered by the beings there. The Six Paths are: (1) the realm of hell, (2) the realm of hungry ghosts (*gaki* 餓鬼), (3) the realm of animals, (4) the realm of fighting spirits (*asura* 阿修羅), (5) the realm of humans and (6) the realm of heavenly beings. It is in the first of these six sections that we find the most famous passages of the *Ōjōyōshū*, a graphic depiction of the various tortures meted out to beings of hell. Taking up in turn each of the eight subterranean hells of Buddhist cosmology, Genshin describes how the beings there are continually tormented from being slashed, crushed, pierced, boiled and burned by the demons, animals and the natural phenomena of those realms. But the suffering experienced by these beings is not gratuitous; in Genshin’s view, there is a moral point to his bloody portrayal of hell. According to the laws of karma, the pain inflicted upon beings in hell is understood as just retribution of evil actions performed in the past.

The description of hell found in the *Ōjōyōshū* stresses the excruciating agony that beings there must endlessly endure. But suffering is not limited to beings of hell. Adopting the standard Buddhist position, Genshin argues that all existence within the realms of transmigration (i. e., the Six Paths) is characterized by suffering. For example, Genshin describes human existence as marked by impurity, suffering and impermanence, and concludes that life as a human being is highly unsatisfactory, an ordeal to be rejected promptly. Even existence as a heavenly being is fraught with suffering. This is because, even though heavenly beings may enjoy exquisite pleasure during their exceedingly long lives, they must eventually pass away and be reborn in another realm.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, Genshin concludes genuine peace of mind is impossible to obtain as long as one is attached to existence within the Six Paths. True happiness can only be obtained by transcending the Six Paths and achieving birth in the

<sup>2</sup> On the last five of the Six Paths described in the *Ōjōyōshū*, see Robert F. Rhodes, “Hungry Ghosts, Animals, Humans, Fighting Spirits and Heavenly Beings: Genshin’s View of the Five Realms in the *Ōjōyōshū*,” *Bukkyōgaku Seminar* 仏教学セミナー, 64 (1996): 33–51.

Pure Land of Amida Buddha. In the second chapter of the *Ōjōyōshū*, “Longing for the Pure Land,” Genshin lists ten pleasures of birth in the Pure Land (T 84, 41b–46b). Although Genshin does not deny the various sensual and material pleasures of the Pure Land (for example, he explains that the Pure Land is most pleasing to look at), he stresses those aspects of the Pure Land that nurture one’s faith and insight into the Buddhist Dharma. Genshin’s ten pleasures include the following:

- (1) At the time of death, the nembutsu practitioner will be led to the Pure Land by a host of bodhisattvas.
- (2) People experience incomparable joy upon being born in the Pure Land and perceiving its splendors.
- (3) People born in the Pure Land will all possess the thirty-two marks of a superior being as well as various paranormal powers.
- (4) The physical setting of the Pure Land is exquisite.
- (5) The Pure Land is incomparably blissful.
- (6) People born in the Pure Land can instruct relatives and friends in the Buddhist teachings freely and without obstruction.
- (7) People born in the Pure Land will encounter various celestial bodhisattvas, such as Mañjuśrī (Jp. Monju 文殊), Maitreya (Jp. Miroku 弥勒), Kṣitigarbha (Jp. Jizō 地藏), Avalokiteśvara (Jp. Kannon 観音) and Mahāsthāmaprāpta (Jp. Seishi 勢至).
- (8) Once born in the Pure Land, it is possible to receive instruction in the Buddhist teachings directly from Amida Buddha.
- (9) People born in the Pure Land can not only pay obeisance to Amida Buddha, but can freely travel to other Buddha lands and venerate the Buddhas there.
- (10) The Pure Land provides an ideal environment for practicing the Buddha Dharma and achieving enlightenment.

In this way, in the first two chapters of the *Ōjōyōshū*, Genshin constructs a Pure Land map of the universe, in which he contrasts the suffering of existence within the Six Paths with the blissful conditions of Amida Buddha’s Pure Land. Its purpose is to demonstrate that one should not cling to this wretched world of transmigration and to convince the readers that salvation is possible only by obtaining birth in the Pure Land.

In the remainder of this paper, I will take up Genshin’s vision of the Buddhist hells as found in the *Ōjōyōshū*. The description of the hells presented in this text is important for two reasons. First, as stated above,

Genshin contrasts the sufferings of transmigration to the pleasures of the Pure Land in order to emphasize that the former must be abandoned for the latter. Because the agonies of the hells represent the most extreme forms of suffering inherent in transmigratory existence, the description of the hells plays a crucial role in Genshin's rhetoric of Pure Land soteriology. Second, the terrifying depiction of the hells in the *Ōjōyōshū* had an enormous impact on the Japanese religious and literary imagination. Thus, both in order to understand the Pure Land philosophy of the *Ōjōyōshū* itself and its influence on the subsequent development of Japanese religions and culture, it is necessary to consider Genshin's understanding of hell.

### I. The Development of the Buddhist Concept of Hell

Hells make their appearance very early within Indian Buddhist discourse.<sup>3</sup> The *Dhammapada*, an early Buddhist text, contains a chapter referring to hell as a postmortem destiny for people who have committed unwholesome actions during their lifetimes.<sup>4</sup> The *Sutta Nipāta*, another early text, gives a list of ten hells, revealing that, by this time, Buddhists had come to accept the existence of multiple hells. However, this text only provides the names of these hells and describes neither the characteristics of these hells nor the tortures inflicted on the beings who fall into them.<sup>5</sup>

A fuller description of hell appears in the *Devadūtasutta* (Discourse on the Deva Messengers) found in the *Majjhima-nikāya*. Many important motifs which frequently recur in later texts are found in this sūtra. This sūtra

<sup>3</sup> The development of the Buddhist concept of hell is well described in Ishida Mizumaro's "Jigoku towa nanika 地獄とは何か [What is Hell?]," in his *Jigoku 地獄* [Hell], (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1985): 8–87. The following discussion of the Buddhist hells is greatly indebted to this article. A standard work on the Buddhist hells in Japanese is *Jigoku no hanashi 地獄の話* [Stories of Hell] by Yamabe Shūgaku 山辺習学 (Reprint. Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1981). A useful English work, focusing in particular on the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, is *The Buddhist Concept of Hell* by Alicia and Daigan Matsunaga (New York: Philosophical Library, 1972). Short accounts of the Buddhist hells in the *Ōjōyōshū* are found in Michele Marra, "The Development of Mappō Thought in Japan (I)" in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 15 (1): 42–44, and in Umehara Takeshi 梅原 猛, *Jigoku no shisō: Nihon seishin no ichi keifu 地獄の思想—日本精神の一系譜* [The Philosophy of Hell: A Genealogy of the Japanese Spirit]. (Reprint. Tokyo: Chūō kōronsha, 1983), 75–91.

<sup>4</sup> John Ross Carter and Mahinda Palihawadana, trans., *The Dhammapada* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 332–41.

<sup>5</sup> K. R. Norman, trans., *The Group of Discourses: Sutta-nipāta* (London: Pali Text Society, 1984), 112.

describes how people who have committed evil in their lives are taken before Yama, the king of hell, who questions them about their evil conduct and consigns them to Great Niraya Hell. The hell is encircled by iron walls and filled with flames which burn the people's skin, flesh and tendons. Adjacent to the Great Niraya Hell are several other hells. In one hell, which is filled with excrement, people are attacked by needle-mouthed creatures who cut away their skin, hides, flesh, tendons and bones to eat their marrow. Nearby is the Ember Hell, of which no description is given. Next to the Ember Hell is the Forest of Silk Cotton Trees. The trees in this forest have burning prickles. People are forced to climb up and down these trees. Also close by is the Sword-leafed Forest. When a wind blows, the sharp leaves fall on the people below, cutting off their hands, feet, ears and nose. Finally there is the River of Caustic Water. The guardians of hell pull the people out of this river with a fish hook and force them to swallow scalding copper pellets. Only when the karmic effects of their evil deeds are exhausted can the people who have fallen into these hells be released from their suffering.<sup>6</sup>

The description of hell found in most later texts are, on the whole, elaborations of that found in the *Devadūtasutta*. Two developments are particularly important in situating Genshin's view of hell. First, following the lead of this sutra, many texts describe each hell as having a number of subsidiary hells. The most elaborate description is found in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, where each hell is said to be surrounded by sixteen subsidiary hells.<sup>7</sup> Second, although some early texts, including the *Sutta Nipāta*, mention ten hells,<sup>8</sup> most later texts come to recognize the existence of eight hells. According to such works as the *Ta chih tu lun* 大智度論 (The Great Perfection of Wisdom Treatise; T 25, 175c–176c) and the *Yogācārabhūmi* 瑜伽師地論 (T 30, 295c–297a), the names and order of the eight hells are as follows:

- (1) Revival (Saṃjīva) Hell (Tōkatsu jigoku 等活地獄)
- (2) Black Rope (Kālasūtra) Hell (Kokujō jigoku 黑繩地獄)
- (3) Assembly (Saṃghāta) Hell (Shugō jigoku 衆合地獄)
- (4) Wailing (Raurava) Hell (Kyōkan jigoku 叫喚地獄)

<sup>6</sup> I. B. Horner, trans., *The Middle Length Sayings*. Vol. 3. (London: Pali Text Society, 1959), 224–29.

<sup>7</sup> On the sixteen subsidiary hells in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, see Matsunaga and Matsunaga, *The Buddhist Concept of Hell*, 107–136, and Ishida, *Jigoku*, 39–45.

<sup>8</sup> Matsunaga and Matsunaga, *The Buddhist Concept of Hell*, 41.

- (5) Great Wailing (Mahāraurava) Hell (Daikyōkan jigoku 大叫喚地獄)
- (6) Scorching Heat (Tāpana) Hell (Shōnetsu jigoku 焦熱地獄)
- (7) Great Scorching Heat (Pratāpana) Hell (Daishōnetsu jigoku 大焦熱地獄)
- (8) Avīci Hell (Abi jigoku 阿鼻地獄; also known as Unremitting Hell or Muken jigoku 無間地獄)<sup>9</sup>

These eight hells are described as existing beneath the earth, one below the other. They are called “fiery hells,” and are characterized by the flames frequently found in them. In addition to these eight fiery hells, there is also believed to exist eight “freezing hells,” characterized by their extreme cold.<sup>10</sup> These eight freezing hell are:

- (1) Arbuda Hell (Anbuda jigoku 頰部陀地獄)
- (2) Nirarbuda Hell (Nirabuda jigoku 尼刺部陀地獄)
- (3) Aṭaṭa Hell (Ansetsuta jigoku 頰嘶叱地獄)
- (4) Hahava Hell (Kakaba jigoku 屢屢婆地獄)
- (5) Huhuva Hell (Kogoba jigoku 虎虎婆地獄)
- (6) Utpala Hell (Ubara jigoku 嚙鉢羅地獄)
- (7) Padma Hell (Batoma jigoku 鉢特摩地獄)
- (8) Mahāpadma Hell (Makahadoma jigoku 摩訶鉢特摩地獄)

However, the description of these eight freezing hells is often quite brief. In general, they seem to have made little impact on the Buddhist image of hell.

## II. The Eight Hells in the *Ōjōyōshū*

The discussion of the hells found in the *Ōjōyōshū* focuses on the eight fiery hells found in texts like the *Ta chih tu lun* and the *Yogācārabhūmi*. Although Genshin mentions the eight freezing hells, he only states in passing, “There are also eight freezing hells like the Arbuda. For details, see the sutras and treatises. There is no time to discuss them now” (T 84, 37a). For Genshin, these freezing hells were apparently of little significance.

Although a number of Buddhist texts contains descriptions of the hells, Genshin draws on a relatively limited number of them in constructing his

<sup>9</sup> The Chinese characters and Japanese readings of the names of these hells are those found in the *Ōjōyōshū*. There are slight variations in the ways in which these names are translated into Chinese in the *Ta chih tu lun* and *Yogācārabhūmi*.

<sup>10</sup> In the *Ta chih tu lun*, these hells are explained at T 25, 176c–7a. In the *Yogācārabhūmi*, they are treated at T 30, 297a.

vision of hell. In fact, he only cites by name seven texts: *Ta chih tu lun*, *Yogācārabhūmi*, *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, *Abhidharmakośa*, *Yu p'o sai chieh ching* 優婆塞戒經 (Sūtra of the Upāsaka's [Layman's] Precepts), *Kuan fo san mei hai ching* 觀仏三昧海經 (Sūtra on the Ocean-like Samādhi for Contemplating the Buddha) and *Chu ching yao chi* 諸經要集 (Essentials of the Various Sūtras).

Genshin's description of the eight hells follows a fixed pattern. He regularly begins the discussion of each hell with an explanation of where the particular hell is located. Next he provides a description of the main hell, generally citing first the *Ta chih tu lun* and the *Yogācārabhūmi*, then the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*. However, as the discussion below will show, even within this limited number of texts, the description of the torments of the hells differs significantly from each other. Besides these texts, in his discussion of the Revival Hell, Genshin refers by name to the *Chu ching yao chi*. This text is a Chinese compendium of Buddhist doctrines compiled during the T'ang dynasty by the monk Tao-shih 道世. Genshin does not mention the *Chu ching yao chi* by name anywhere else. However, it is cited without attribution in the sections dealing with several other hells.

Third, Genshin explains the reasons (or karmic causes) why beings fall into that hell and discusses the life spans of the beings there. Genshin cites the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* to explain the karmic causes leading to rebirth in the first seven hells. He follows the theory of the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching* to explain the reason why people fall into the eighth Avīci Hell. Likewise, with the exception of Avīci Hell, Genshin follows the *Abhidharmakośa* in describing the length of the lives of the beings of each hell. The life span of the beings of Avīci Hell is explained on the basis of the theory found in the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching*.

Finally, Genshin turns to a description of the various subsidiary hells surrounding each main hell, using the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* as his primary source. However, Genshin frequently (and quite often drastically) shortens the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*'s descriptions of the subsidiary hells when quoting from it in the *Ōjōyōshū*. We may also mention here that there is only one place where Genshin cites a text other than the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* in describing the subsidiary hells. This is in his portrayal of the subsidiary hells of Avīci Hell, where he quotes from the *Yogācārabhūmi* along with the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*.

With these preliminary remarks, let us next turn to Genshin's description of the eight hells.

## 1. Revival Hell

The description of the Revival Hell, the first of the eight hells, begins with the following words:

First, the Revival Hell is located one thousand *yojanas* below Jambudvīpa. It is ten thousand *yojanas* square in size. The inmates there always harbor in their hearts the desire to harm others. If they happen to see each other, they are like hunters who have encountered deer. They each seize and tear at one another with iron claws until the blood and flesh are all gone and only the bones remain. Or else the wardens of hell, with iron staves and iron clubs gripped in their hands, completely beat (the hell-dweller's) body from head to foot, until it is crushed and is like a heap of sand. Or else (the wardens) slice the flesh (of the hell-dweller's body) into pieces with extremely sharp knives, like a cook butchering the flesh of fish. When a refreshing wind blows, they soon revive and return to their previous state. They quickly stand up again, and are tormented like before. Or else it is said that there is a voice in the sky which cries out, "These sentient beings should once again revive as before." Or else it is said that the wardens strike the ground with an iron trident, shouting, "Revive, revive!" The sufferings (inflicted upon the inmates of this hell) cannot be described in all their detail. [End. This passage was written on the basis of the *Ta chih tu lun*, *Yogācārabhūmi* and *Chu ching yao chi*.] (T 84, 33a-b)

As Genshin himself notes at the end of this quotation, this passage is composed of passages taken from the *Ta chih tu lun* (T 25, 175c), *Yogācārabhūmi* (T 30, 295c) and *Chu ching yao chi* (T 54, 166c–7a). As I will discuss later, the picture of the Revival Hell presented in these three texts differs from each other in substantial ways. In particular, the picture of hell found in the *Chu ching yao chi* seems to belong to a different tradition from those of the *Ta chih tu lun* and the *Yogācārabhūmi*. But instead of choosing between the description of hell in these three texts, Genshin cites the distinctive points of each text, and presents them as alternative or parallel visions of this particular hell. While in some ways, Genshin seeks to impose his authorial control over the description of hell (this is revealed, for example, in his decision to select only these three texts as sources for this



passage), he was also willing to admit that there was a plurality of voices concerning the nature of this hell within the Buddhist textual tradition. The same point can be made concerning his description of the other hells.

After the passage above, Genshin turns to the question of the life span of the beings of this hell. He states,

Fifty years of a human life equals one day and night in the heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings. The life span there is five hundred years. The life span (of the beings) in the Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings equals one day and night in this hell. . . . [End. The life span is based upon the *Abhidharmakośa*. . . . The same is true of the following six (hells).] The *Yu p'o sai chieh ching* holds that one year in the first heaven (i. e., the Heaven of the Four Heavenly Kings) equals one day and night of the first hell (i. e., Revival Hell). (T 84, 33b)

The problem of the life span of the beings of hell is obviously an important one, since it determines how long one must endure the suffering there. Here again, Genshin admits that there is a plurality of opinions concerning this question within the Buddhist texts, and cites two theories: one from the *Abhidharmakośa*, and another from the *Yu p'o sai chieh ching*. However, it is important to note that this is actually the only place where he cites two texts concerning the life span of the beings of hell. In all other places, he only cites the *Abhidharmakośa*. Finally, Genshin concludes with the statement that people who kill living beings fall into this hell. As mentioned above, Genshin follows the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* in giving this reason as to why beings are reborn into this hell.

After the description above, Genshin turns to an account of the sixteen subsidiary hells found outside the walls of the Revival Hell. Genshin's account of these regions is taken from the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*. But as Genshin himself notes in the *Ōjōyōshū* (T 84, 33c), although the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* lists the names of all sixteen subsidiary hells, the *sūtra* only provides a description of the first seven and omits the rest.<sup>11</sup> Hence Genshin, too, only discusses these seven subsidiary hells. Genshin describes them as follows:

(1) The Region of the Mud of Excrement. This region brims with boiling

<sup>11</sup> In the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, the names of the sixteen subsidiary hells are found at T 17, 27a–b. The description of the seven subsidiary hells is found at T 17, 27b–29b.

hot mud of excrement and is overrun with insects with snouts as hard as diamonds. These insects swarm around the hell-dweller as he gorges on excrement and attack him, tearing his skin and eating his flesh or breaking open his bones and sucking his marrow. People who killed deer and birds in the past fall here.

(2) The Region of the Wheel of Swords. This region is surrounded by an iron wall ten *yojanas* in height. A fierce fire—so intense that anyone who is touched by it immediately explodes into countless pieces—burns there constantly. Hot iron falls from the sky like rain. This region is also covered by forests of swords with extremely sharp blades; sharp swords also rain down from the sky. People who murdered out of avarice fall into this region.

(3) The Region of the Roasting Skillet. In this region, the hell-dweller is placed in a scorching skillet and roasted like beans. People who roasted and ate the animals they killed fall into this hell.

(4) The Region of Numerous Sufferings. The beings here are tormented by innumerable types of sufferings. Those who bound people with ropes, beat people with staves, forced people to march long distances, pushed people off cliffs, tortured people by smoking them, scared small children and caused people anguish in various ways fall into this region.

(5) The Region of Darkness. This region is pitch dark and the people there are burned by opaque fire. A fiery wind blows and lacerates their skins like sharp swords. People who killed sheep by suffocating them or killed turtles by crushing them between tiles fall here.

(6) The Region of Unhappiness. Great fires burn day and night. Dogs, foxes and birds with flaming beaks constantly attack and devour the people here. Insects with snouts as hard as diamonds fly among the corpses, sucking their marrow. People who hunted for birds and animals by blowing conch shells, beating drums and making fearful sounds fall into this region.

(7) The Region of Extreme Suffering. People here are constantly being burned. Lazy people who killed living beings fall here.

## 2. Black Rope Hell

The Black Rope Hell lies beneath the Revival Hell, and is identical in size to the latter. The wardens of the Black Rope Hell force its inmates to lie down on the scorching iron ground, mark their bodies with scorching iron ropes, and hack them along these lines with axes. At other times, the wardens dismember the inmates with saws or butcher them with knives into a hundred

thousand pieces. The inmates are also forced to walk into a large net of scalding iron ropes, which burns their flesh, sears their bones and causes them unbearable pain.

At the right and left edges of the hell are found tall mountains, each with an iron banner on its peak. The beings of hell are forced to walk over an iron rope strung between the flagpoles upon which the banners are hung. When they fall, as they invariably do, the inmates plunge into one of numerous boiling cauldrons placed beneath the tightrope.

Like the description of the Revival Hell above, this passage is also a composite of various texts. In his interlinear notes, Genshin states that the first section derives from the *Ta chih tu lun* (T 25, 175c–6a) and the *Yogācārabhūmi* (T 30, 295c). However, as before, it is a paraphrase of these two texts; Genshin's source texts present a far more detailed picture of this hell than he is willing to incorporate into his narrative. Also, although he does not cite it by name, the passage concerning the scalding iron net derives from the *Chu ching yao chi* (T 54, 167c). The second part, from the part of the two iron mountains, derives from the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching* (T 15, 673c). Although this final text presents a significant alternative tradition concerning hell, Genshin rarely cites it in his description of the suffering found in the other hells.

The suffering experienced by beings in this hell is ten times more painful than that experienced in the former Revival Hell. As for the life span of beings born in this hell, Genshin states,

One hundred years of human life is (equal to) one day and night in Trāyastriṃśa Heaven. The life span (of the heavenly beings there) is one thousand years. The life span (of the heavenly beings) in Trāyastriṃśa Heaven is (equal to) one day and night (in Black Rope Hell). The life span (of beings) in this hell is a thousand years. (T 84, 33c)

Murderers and thieves are born into this hell as retribution for their evil actions.

Next, Genshin here introduces a theme that is echoed continuously in his depiction of the hells: that the torments one receives in hell are retribution for evils acts one has committed in the past. This point is made explicitly in the following verse which the hell-wardens address to the beings here (these verses are taken from *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*).

Your mind is your foremost enemy.  
 This enemy is most detestable.  
 This enemy binds people  
 And sends them to Yama's place.  
 You, and only you, are burned by the fires of hell  
 And are devoured by your evil karma.  
 Neither your wife, children or brothers—  
 (None of) your relatives can save you (T 84, 33c).<sup>12</sup>

Here, all suffering in hell is declared the result of one's evil actions in the past. Since it is one's mental desires which lead one to commit evil deeds, the mind is identified as one's foremost enemy, the very agent that causes oneself to be born in hell. It is only by controlling one's mind and not being led astray by one's blind desires that one can free oneself from suffering in a future reincarnation.

According to the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, the Black Rope Hell contains sixteen subsidiary hells. (However, this text discusses only three of the sixteen subsidiary hells.) Genshin specifically describes two of them. First, in the Region of Equal Wailing and Reception of Suffering, the beings of hell are bound with flaming black ropes, pitched off cliffs countless *yojanas* tall and plunge onto the scorching ground covered with sharp iron swords below. Dogs with flaming iron fangs tear at the impaled bodies. Even though they wail out loud in pain, there is no one to help these beings of hell. People who formerly preached false teachings and committed suicide by jumping off cliffs fall into this hell. In the Region of the Fearful Boiling,<sup>13</sup> wardens with staffs, flaming swords and crossbows chase the beings of hell day and night. People who formerly tied others up and committed murder out of greed for their victim's possessions fall into this hell.

### 3. Assembly Hell

The Assembly Hell lies beneath the Black Rope Hell, and is identical in size to the latter. According to such texts as the *Ta chih tu lun* (T 25, 176a) and

<sup>12</sup> The first four lines of this verse is found in the discussion of the Region of Equal Wailing and Reception of Suffering (T 17, 29c). The last four lines are taken from the description of the Assembly Hell found in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* (T 17, 32c).

<sup>13</sup> In the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, this subsidiary hell is called the Region of the Fearful Eagle. See T 17, 30c.

*Yogācārabhūmi* (T 30, 295c–6a), many iron mountains are to be found in this hell. People who fall into this hell are led by the wardens into a space between two of these iron mountains. The mountains then crash into each other, crushing the people between them. Iron mountains fall from the sky, crushing the people below. The wardens also place the people on stone slabs and pound them with stones, or else, place them in iron mortars and grind them with iron pestles. Their corpses are eaten by the demons, beasts and birds of hell. (The passage about beings beaten on stone slabs and ground with iron pestles derives from the *Chu ching yao chi* [T 54, 167c]).<sup>14</sup>

The *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* provides another description of the horrors of this hell (T 17, 31b–32b). According to this sutra, eagles with flaming iron beaks attack the people of this hell and tear out their entrails. Carrying the entrails in their beaks, the eagles fly off to the tops of tall trees and feast on them at leisure. In this hell, there is a great river of molten copper from which protrude flaming iron hooks. Standing on the banks of the river, the wardens seize the beings of hell and throw them on the hooks. Many people can also be seen floating down the molten metal river.

Furthermore, the wardens of hell place the beings of hell in a forest of trees with sharp knife-like leaves. Looking up, the hell-dweller sees a beautiful woman at the top of the tree. Overcome with lust, he begins to climb the tree and is slashed and mutilated in the process. But once he reaches the top, he finds that the woman is now at the foot of the tree. Beckoned by the woman to come down and embrace her, he begins to climb down the tree. But now the sharp blades of the knife-like leaves all face up, and once again, his body is completely lacerated. When he reaches the foot of the tree, he finds the woman once more at the tree top, and commences the climb again. This continues for countless numbers of years. However, as the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* states, this is the result of one's evil thoughts; people subjected to this torture are only being led astray by their own minds. This point is highlighted by the verses which the hell-wardens preach to the people of this hell:

It is not that one person does an evil deed  
And another person receives its painful retributions.  
One receives the fruit of one's own deed.  
It is thus for all beings. (T 84, 34a)<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> However, this text does not state that people are placed in iron mortars. Instead, it states that people are made to lie on the ground and are pounded by iron pestles.

<sup>15</sup> In the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, this verse is found in the section describing

Next, Genshin explains the life span of the beings of this hell as follows:

Two hundred years of human life is (equal to) one day and night in the Heaven of Yama. The life span (of the heavenly beings there) is two thousand years. The life span (of the heavenly beings) in that heaven (is equal to) one day and night in this hell. The life span (of beings in this hell) is two thousand years. (T 84, 34a)

Murderers, thieves and adulterers are said to fall into this hell.

The *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* also describes in detail sixteen subsidiary hells, but Genshin only treats three of them in the *Ōjōyōshū*. The first one taken up by Genshin (and the fourth of the sixteen regions treated in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*; T 17, 33c–34a) is the Region of Evil Views. This region is reserved for people who molest children. People who fall into this region are forced to watch their own children being stabbed in the genitals by the hell-wardens. Seeing their children being subjected to such pain, the beings of this hell experience unspeakable grief. Besides enduring such suffering, they themselves are also hung upside down, and molten copper is poured into their bodies from the anus, scorching their entrails. In these ways, people who fall into this hell receive both mental and physical suffering as retribution for their past actions for countless numbers of years.

Another section of the Assembly Hell is known as the Region of Many Sufferings and Anguish. (This is the sixth of the sixteen regions discussed in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*; T 17, 34b–c). Men who commit homosexual rape fall into this region. After falling into this region, they are embraced by the flaming figures of the people they have molested. After being burned in this way, the bodies of the beings of hell fall to the ground in pieces. But they are quickly resurrected. With great fear, they run away, only to fall off a high cliff and be eaten by birds with flaming beaks and foxes with flaming jaws.

The last region treated by Genshin here is called the Suffering Enduring Region. (This is the seventh of the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*'s sixteen regions; T 17, 34c–35a). Men who abduct the wives of other men fall into this region.<sup>16</sup> The people of this region are hung upside down from a tree

---

the tenth subsidiary hell, called the Region where Burning Tears Flow, of the Assembly Hell (T 17, 36b). Here, this verse forms a part of a much longer verse.

<sup>16</sup> The *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* specifically states that this refers to men who take other people's wives as spoils of war after defeating the army of another country (T 17, 34c).

and roasted over a great fire. When they open their mouths to scream, the fire enters their bodies and burns their viscera.

#### 4. Wailing Hell

The Wailing Hell lies beneath the Assembly Hell, and is identical in size to the latter. The heads of the wardens of this hell are golden in color and flames burn forth from their eyes. They have long arms and legs, and can run as quickly as the wind. Their voices are dreadful. Hearing their voices, the terrified beings of this hell prostrate themselves before the wardens and beg for mercy, saying, "Please be compassionate and let me go." However, these words only increase the wrath of the wardens.

The wardens strike the heads of the beings of hell with iron staffs and make them run over the ground made of scorching iron. Or else the beings of hell are fried in a skillet or boiled in a cauldron. Others are ushered into a flaming iron room. Their mouths are forced open with pincers, and molten copper is then poured into their mouths, scalding their inner organs. With hatred, the beings of hell cry out to the wardens as follows:

Don't you have any compassion?  
And why don't you keep still?  
We are people deserving compassion.  
Why don't you show compassion to us? (T 84, 34b)

To this the wardens reply:

Having been deceived by the ropes of love,  
You have committed evil and unwholesome deeds.  
You are now receiving the retributions of your evil deeds.  
Why do you hate and feel anger towards me? (T 84, 34b)

The wardens also reprimand,

Formerly, you committed evil deeds  
Deceived by desire and folly.  
Why didn't you repent at that time?  
It's no use to repent now. (T 84, 34b-c)

Here again, Genshin stresses that the tortures of hell are the result of one's evil deeds in the past.

While Genshin states that the description above is based on the *Ta chih tu*

*lun*, *Yogācārabhūmi* and *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, it also contains a reference to the *Chu ching yao chi* as well. The first paragraph, detailing the appearance of the hell-wardens and describing how the denizens of hell pray for mercy from them, along with the statement that hell-dwellers are beaten with iron staffs and made to run on scorching ground, paraphrases the *Ta chih tu lun* (T 25, 176a). From the *Yogācārabhūmi* (T 30, 296a) come the words that hell-dwellers are locked in burning iron rooms. (The *Ta chih tu lun* contains a similar story, except that here, hell-dwellers are locked in a room in an iron tower and smoked.) The line about denizens of hell being fried in a skillet or boiled in a cauldron is taken from the *Chu ching yao chi* (T 54, 167c), while the section about them being forced to drink molten copper comes from the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* (T 17, 39a–b). The final exchange in the verse between the hell-dweller and the wardens is taken from the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* (T 17, 41a; the wardens' second verse, however, comes from another lengthy set of verses found four pages later, at T 17, 45a).

Concerning the life span of the beings of this hell, Genshin explains as follows:

Four hundred years of human life is (equal to) one day and night in Tuṣita Heaven. The life span (of the heavenly beings there) is four thousand years. The life span (of the heavenly beings) in Tuṣita Heaven is (equal to) one day and night in this hell. The life span (of beings in this hell) is four thousand years. (T 84, 34c)

Murderers, thieves, adulterers and drunkards are said to fall into this hell.

According to the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, this hell also has sixteen subsidiary hells. However, Genshin only takes up two of them. The first, the Region of the Worms at the End of Fire (the fourth of the sixteen regions described in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, T 17, 41b–c), is set aside for people who sold diluted wine. People who fall into this region are subject to all the four hundred and four kinds of diseases.<sup>17</sup> The second region, the Region of Mist of Burning Cloud, is the fifteenth region listed in the *sūtra* (T 17, 44b). People who shamed others by making them drunk and making a sport of them receive the sufferings of this hell. After falling here, the people are made to walk into a raging fire. The fire consumes their entire

<sup>17</sup> There are said to be one hundred and one diseases connected with each of the four elements that constitute the body, making a total of four hundred and four diseases. See Ishida, *Genshin*, 18–19, note on “*Fū to . . . (風と . . .)*.”



body, but they quickly revive and undergo the same ordeal over and over again for countless hundreds of thousand years.

### 5. Great Wailing Hell

Although the description of this hell found in all of his sources, including the *Ta chih tu lun*, *Yogācārabhūmi* and *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, is at least as long as those of other hells, Genshin devotes only a few lines to it in the *Ōjōyōshū*. After beginning this section with the statement that this hell lies beneath the Wailing Hell and is identical in size to the latter, Genshin states that the suffering experienced by the beings here is ten times as painful as that of the previous four hells. However he does not give any specific description of the torments encountered in this hell. Concerning the life span of the beings here, Genshin states,

Eight hundred years of human life is (equal to) one day and night in Nirmāṇa-rataya Heaven. The life span (of the heavenly beings) there is eight thousand years. The life span (of the heavenly beings) in that heaven is (equal to) one day and night in this hell. The life span (of beings in this hell) is eight thousand years. (T 84, 34c)

Murderers, thieves, adulterers, drunkards and liars fall into this hell. In his description of this hell, Genshin in particular focuses on the last transgression, lying, and quotes the following lines which the hell-wardens address to the inmates:

Lying is the supreme fire,  
It can burn up even a great ocean.  
How much more easily (can it burn) a liar.  
(It's as easy as) burning a bundle of sticks and grass. (T 84, 34c)<sup>18</sup>

Interestingly, the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* depicts, not sixteen, but eighteen subsidiary hells associated with the Great Wailing Hell. However, Genshin refers to only two of them here, both of which are associated with lying. In the first, the Region for Receiving the Suffering of Being Stabbed by a Spearhead, sharp hot iron needles are thrust into the mouths and

<sup>18</sup> This verse originally forms a part of a longer verse found in the discussion of the Region Where One Receives Limitless Suffering, the sixteenth subsidiary hell of the Great Wailing Hell described in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* (T 17, 53a).

tongues of the people.<sup>19</sup> In the second, called the Region Where One Receives Limitless Suffering, the wardens pull out the tongues of the beings of hell with hot iron pincers. Other beings of hell have their eyes plucked out with pincers while still others are sliced up with sharp razor-like knives.<sup>20</sup> These sufferings are all retributions for lying in the past.

## 6. Scorching Heat Hell

The Scorching Heat Hell lies beneath the Great Wailing Hell, and is identical in size to the latter. The people of this hell are thrown onto the scorching iron ground and are beaten and pounded from head to foot with scorching iron staves until they are reduced to a mound of flesh. Others are fried in a large sizzling iron skillet, impaled lengthwise from the buttock to the head on a spit and roasted, boiled in cauldrons or placed in a scorching tower and burned until the flames pierce their bones and marrow. The destructive power of the flames of this hell is enormous: a flame of the size of a bean can utterly burn up the continent of Jambudvīpa in an instant. Thus the people who fall into this hell experience unendurable pain when burned by its flames. When compared to the flames of this hell, the flames of the previous five hells are like snow or frost.

Once again, this portrait of hell is based on the *Ta chih tu lun*, *Yogācārabhūmi*, *Chu ching yao chi* and *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*. The first part of the description above, describing how the hell-dwellers are beaten, fried and roasted on a spit, is a paraphrase of the *Yogācārabhūmi* (T 30, 296a). The statement that the hell-dwellers are boiled in a cauldron comes from the *Ta chih tu lun* (T 25, 176b), while the words that they are burned alive in a scorching tower derives from the *Chu ching yao chi* (T 54, 168a). The description of the flames of this hell derives from the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* (T 17, 55c).

The life span of the denizens of this hell is as follows:

One thousand six hundred years of human life is (equal to) one day and night in Para-nirmita-vaśa-vartina Heaven. The life span (of the heavenly beings there) is sixteen thousand years. The

<sup>19</sup> This is the fifteenth region in the sutra; see T 17, 52b–c. According to the sutra, people who promise to donate offerings to the monkhood and then renege on their promise fall into this hell.

<sup>20</sup> This region is the sixteenth subsidiary hell. According to the sutra, it is reserved for various types of liars, like pilots who lead ships into traps set by pirates. See T 17, 52c–53b.

life span (of the heavenly beings of) Para-nirmita-vaśa-vartina Heaven is (equal to) one day and night (in this hell). The life span (of beings in this hell) is the same (as that of the beings of Para-nirmita-vaśa-vartina Heaven). (T 84, 35a)

Murderers, thieves, adulterers, drunkards, liars and people with heterodox views fall into this hell.

Genshin also treats two of the sixteen subsidiary hells described in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* (these two regions are treated in the sutra at T 17, 56a-b and 61b-c, respectively).

(1) The Puṇḍarīka Region. The people of this region are completely engulfed in flames. There is not a space as small as a mustard seed on their bodies that is not covered with flames. They hear a voice calling to them, saying, "You, come quickly! You, come quickly! There is a lake of lotus blossoms (*puṇḍarīka*) here. You can drink water from it and refresh yourself in the shade of the surrounding forest." Hearing these words, they run towards the voice, but fall into a hole filled with flames and their bodies are totally burned. They soon revive but are quickly burned again. Even then, because their thirst has not abated, they rush forward to the lotus lake. But when they reach the lake, they find that it is full of flames five hundred *yojanas* tall. Upon being burned by the flames, the people die but soon revive. People who starved themselves to death in the hopes of achieving rebirth in heaven, as well as people who led others to believe in heterodox views, fall into this region of hell.

(2) The Region of Dark Fire Wind. The people of this hell are blown into the sky by a terrible whirlwind, where they tumble around in circles. After that, they are buffeted by wind as sharp as swords which cuts their bodies into tiny pieces and scatters them in the ten directions. After being scattered, they revive, only to be cut up and scattered again. People fall into this hell as a result of having held the following mistaken view: All things can be classified into what is permanent and impermanent, and that, although the body is impermanent, the four elements are permanent.

## 7. Great Scorching Heat Hell

The Great Scorching Heat Hell lies beneath the Scorching Heat Hell, and is identical in size to the latter. The suffering experienced by people in this hell is the same as that experienced by the denizens of the Scorching Heat Hell, only ten times greater. The life span of the beings of this hell is half an inter-

mediate kalpa. Murderers, thieves, adulterers, drunkards, liars, people who hold mistaken views as well as those who defiled pure nuns who kept the precepts fall into this hell.

The description given by Genshin of this hell derives mainly from the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* (T 17, 62a–64a). After they die, while in the state between rebirths, the people destined for this hell are met by a ferocious-looking warden of hell. The warden's eyes blaze like bright lamps. Curved pointed tusks protrude from the corners of the mouth. This terrifying warden binds the people by their necks and marches them off, deeper and deeper into the earth, to hell. The distance they march is three billion six hundred million *yojanas* in all. After reaching the entrance to hell, the people destined for hell are upbraided by Yama for the evil deeds they have committed in their previous lifetime. Bound by the ropes of their evil karma, they are then led into the hell. The entire hell is engulfed in flames, and the beings there are subjected to innumerable forms of suffering. At all times the pitiful wails of the tormented beings can be heard from within the flames. The warden of hell then scolds the people bound for hell with the following verse:

You, hearing the voices from hell,  
Are already fearful like this.  
How much more so shall the fires of hell burn,  
Like fire burning dried kindling and grass.  
The fire burns, but it is not that (the fire) burns.  
It is (your) evil karma which burns. (T 84, 35b)

With these words, the people fall into hell. The flames of this hell are five hundred *yojanas* tall. But as the verse above emphasizes, it is the individuals evil karma which burns and torments him.

Like the other hells, the Great Wailing Hell is also said to possess sixteen subsidiary hells. Among them, Genshin mentions the following two in the *Ōjōyōshū*.

(1) One subsidiary hell is completely engulfed in flames. Although Genshin does not mention its name, this region is known as the Region of Total Darkness (T 17, 66b–67c). There is not even a space of a pinhead that is not permeated by flames. Even though they cry out in pain, the hell-dwellers who fall into this region are burned alive for innumerable billions of years. People who have violated devout laywomen fall into this region.

(2) Another region is called the Region Where One Universally Receives

All Anguish. After being skinned alive, the beings here are laid side by side on the red-hot ground and fried. Molten iron is also poured on their bodies. Into this hell fall monks who have violated precept-keeping women after intoxicating them with wine or after deceiving them with gifts.

### 8. Avīci Hell

Avīci Hell lies beneath the Great Scorching Heat Hell and is located at the very bottom of the Realm of Desire. Genshin's description of this hell is based on the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, *Kuan fo san mei hai ching* and *Yogācārabhūmi*. He first begins with a paraphrase of the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* (T 17, 76a–77c). After they die, while in the state of between rebirths, the people destined for Avīci Hell wail out loudly and utter the following verse.

There is nothing but flames.  
 They fill the sky and there is no space (between the flames).  
 In the four directions, in the four intermediate directions  
 And on the ground, there is no place which is free (of flames).  
 Every place on the ground  
 Is filled with evil people.  
 I can't rely on anything.  
 I am alone, with no companion.  
 I am within the darkness of this evil realm  
 And will (soon) enter the mass of flames.  
 In the sky, I can  
 See neither the sun, the moon nor the stars. (T 84, 35c)

Upon hearing this verse, the wardens of hell angrily retort:

Whether it is during the kalpa of increasing life span or the kalpa  
 of decreasing life span,  
 Great fires will roast you.  
 Being a foolish person, you have already committed evil acts.  
 Why do you feel remorse now?  
 (The suffering you will experience) is not (the fault of) heavenly  
 beings, *asuras*,  
*Gandharvas*, dragons or demons.  
 (It is the result of your) being bound up in the net of your karma.  
 There is no one who can save you.

Suppose, from within the great ocean,  
You scoop up a handful of water.

This suffering (that you are experiencing now) is comparable to  
this handful of water.

The suffering you will later receive (in hell) is comparable to the  
great ocean. (T 84, 35c)<sup>21</sup>

After they have been admonished thus by the wardens, the beings destined for Avīci fall downward into the earth, head first, for two thousand years and finally arrive in that hell.

The next portion of Genshin's description of Avīci Hell is taken from the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching* (T 15, 668c). Avīci Hell is encircled by seven concentric iron walls and seven iron nets. Below them are eighteen fences and forests of trees with knife-like leaves. In each of its four corners stands a bronze dog forty *yojanas* tall. Its eyes are like lightning, its fangs are like swords, its teeth are like mountains of knives, and its tongue is sharp as a thorn. Flames burst forth from all its pores and the smoke they give forth exudes a noxious odor unlike anything on earth. Also in this hell are eighteen wardens. Their heads are like those of a *rākṣa*, and their mouths are like those of a *yakṣa*. Iron balls shoot forth from each of their sixty-four eyes. A raging flame burns from their curved, four-*yojana*-long fangs, engulfing the entire hell. Eight cow heads are perched on top of the wardens' heads. The cow heads have eighteen horns, each of which also shoots forth flames.

Within the seven walls of Avīci Hell are seven iron banners. Flames shoot forth from the tips of the banners like a fountain and cover the entire hell. On the threshold of the four gates of hell are eighteen cauldrons. Molten bronze overflowing from the cauldrons floods the hell completely. Eighty-four thousand snakes and serpents live in the spaces between the fences surrounding the hell. Spitting venom and fire, they roam throughout the hell. Their hiss is as loud as a hundred thousand thunders. When they hiss, large iron balls fall from the sky, filling the hell. Also in the hell are fifty billion worms. Each worm has eighty-four thousand beaks and they spew forth fire which rains down on the hell.

After providing this description of the hell from the *Kuan fo san mei hai ching*, Genshin also cites the following description of Avīci Hell from the *Yogācārabhūmi* (T 30, 296b).

<sup>21</sup> It may be noted here that both the verses of the hell-dwellers and the hell-wardens form a part of a much longer verse.

Blistering flames rush in from all directions and attack the beings of hell. The flames pierce the skin, burn the flesh, sever the tendons, crack the bones and, penetrating the marrow, burn it like kindling drenched in oil. In this way, the entire body is consumed by the flames. So great are these flames that the beings of hell become indistinguishable from the flames; only their pitiful cries reveal that there are living beings within the flames. Furthermore, beings of this hell are repeatedly forced to climb up and down a blistering hot iron mountain. Their tongues are pulled out and stretched out to dry like leather. Their mouths are forced open with hot iron pincers and an iron ball is forced down their throats, burning their throat and viscera. The beings are also forced to swallow molten bronze, with similar results.

According to the *Abhidharmakośa*, the life span of the beings of this hell is one intermediate kalpa. People who committed the five grave offenses, ignored the law of cause and effect, slandered the Mahāyāna, committed the four grave offenses, and ate offerings presented to the saṅgha fall into this hell.

Finally Genshin discusses several subsidiary hells of Avīci Hell. Their description are taken, not only from the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, but from the *Abhidharmakośa* as well. First, Genshin lists four subsidiary hells from the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*. (They are the fifth, sixth, tenth and eleventh of the sixteen found in the sutra. In the sutra, they are treated at T 17, 84c–85b, 85b–c, 87a–b and 87b–88a, respectively.)

(1) The Region where Iron Foxes Feed. The beings of this subsidiary hell are set on fire. The flames which rise from their bodies are ten *yojanas* tall. Iron tiles fall from the sky like rain during a thundershower, crushing the bodies of the beings below. The crushed bodies are then devoured by foxes with flaming fangs. People who set fire to Buddhist statues, monasteries and monks' possessions fall into this region.

(2) The Region of the Black Belly. Beings of this region are beset with hunger so severe that they are forced to eat their own bodies. They are also attacked and eaten by black bellied serpents, and burned in a raging fire or boiled in an iron cauldron. People who ate offerings presented to the Buddha fall into this region.

(3) The Region Where Mountains Fall Like Rain.<sup>22</sup> Iron mountains one

<sup>22</sup> In the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, this subsidiary hell is called "The Region of the Assembly of Two Mountains" (兩山聚). However, the character for "two" is most probably a copyist's error for "rain" (雨). Hence the name of this region should be "The Region Where Mountains Fall Like Rain."

*yojana* in size fall on the beings below, reducing their bodies into lumps of flesh. The beings soon revive, but are quickly crushed again by the falling mountains. Eleven towering flames rove throughout this region, burning anyone they meet. The beings of this region are also slashed all over their bodies by sword-wielding wardens, who further pour molten pewter into the wounds. Finally, all types of illnesses rage throughout this region, tormenting the beings there. People who stole and ate food belonging to *pratyek-abuddhas* fall into this region.

(4) The Region of the Bird. In this region is a bird, as large as an elephant, having a sharp flame-emitting beak. It swoops down on the beings of this region, grabs them, flies high up into the sky and drops them. The unleashed beings fall to a rocky ground and are shattered into a hundred fragments. The bodies are soon reconstituted and the beings revive, but they are quickly caught again and suffer the same fate as before. The roads of this region are strewn with sharp knives, which pierce the feet and legs of those who walk on them. The beings of this region are also assailed by dogs with teeth of fire. People who dammed up rivers and caused those living downstream to die of thirst fall into this region.

The *Yogācārabhūmi* (T 30, 296c–297a) also states that there are sixteen subsidiary hells attached to Avīci Hell, four each outside its four gates. Among the eight hells depicted in the *Yogācārabhūmi*, only this hell is said to possess subsidiary hells. However, unlike the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, the *Yogācārabhūmi* does not describe these subsidiary hells one by one. Instead it gives the following description of these regions. It may be noted that this resembles the description of the various hells found in the *Devadūtasutta*, and that many of the tortures described in this section are similar to those found in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*.

Beings who wander out of the four gates of Avīci Hell first encounter a region covered with hot embers. In this region, the beings find themselves sinking knee-deep into the embers with each step they take. Due to the intense heat, the skin and flesh are badly blistered and fall off the leg. But once the leg is lifted out of the ash, it returns to its former state. In this way, the beings make their way through the embers while suffering unbearable pain.

After crossing the region of hot ash, the beings come upon a swamp filled with corpses and excrement. People who fall into the swamp are attacked by worms living in the putrid mud. Beyond the swamp is a region where the roads are paved with sharp knives, lacerating the feet of all who walk upon



them until the flesh falls off completely. Beyond that is a forest of trees with sharp knife-like leaves. Whenever a being rests in the shade of one of these trees, a slight wind rises and causes the leaves to fall. As a result the being in the shade is severely injured. A black dog then appears to drag away and devour the corpse. After passing through this wood, the being enters a forest of trees with sharp thorns. When the hell-dwellers climb this tree, the thorns all face down and pierce them all over their bodies; when they climb down, all the thorns then face up and pierce the hell-dwellers again. At that time, an iron bird with a sharp beak appears and plucks out the eyes of the hell-dwellers.

Beyond this forest is a wide river of hot ash. The hell-dwellers fall into this river and are boiled like beans. When they try to climb ashore, wardens of hell beat them back into the river. Other hell-dwellers are scooped up from the river and, after having their mouths forced open with iron pincers, are made to swallow red-hot balls of iron and molten bronze. With this, Genshin concludes his description of the eight hells.

### III. Constructing Hell: Genshin's Appropriation of the Various Textual Traditions concerning Hell

As I have tried to demonstrate above, Genshin creatively appropriated the rich and complex tradition concerning hell found in Buddhist texts to construct his own guide to the subterranean realms. In this section, I wish to discuss two of his principle strategies for appropriating his sources: those of selection and abridgment. By selection, I primarily refer to those cases where Genshin, confronted with multiple descriptions of the hells in the scriptures and authoritative treatises, selects what he saw as the most relevant points of the most comprehensive descriptions of hell and weaves them together into his own unique vision. This strategy is exemplified by the descriptive passages found at the beginning of his treatment of each of the eight hells. Let us take for example his description of the Revival Hell. As noted above, the following passage is found at the beginning of his discussion of this hell. Although this passage has already been quoted above, it will once again be given here to facilitate comparison with its sources.

First, the Revival Hell is located one thousand *yojanas* below Jambudvīpa. It is ten thousand *yojanas* square in size. The inmates there always harbor in their hearts the desire to harm others. If they happen to see each other, they are like hunters who have

encountered deer. They each seize and tear at one another with iron claws until the blood and flesh are all gone and only the bones remain. Or else the wardens of hell, with iron staves and iron clubs gripped in their hands, completely beat (the hell-dweller's) body from head to foot, until it is crushed and is like a heap of sand. Or else (the wardens) slice the flesh (of the hell-dweller's body) into pieces with extremely sharp knives, like a cook butchering the flesh of fish. When a refreshing wind blows, they soon revive and return to their previous state. They quickly stand up again, and are tormented like before. Or else it is said that there is a voice in the sky which cries out, "These sentient beings should once again revive as before." Or else it is said that the wardens strike the ground with an iron trident, shouting, "Revive, revive!" The sufferings (inflicted upon the inmates of this hell) cannot be described in all their detail. [End. This passage was written on the basis of the *Ta chih tu lun*, *Yogācārabhūmi* and *Chu ching yao chi*.]

As Genshin states, this passage is based on three texts: *Ta chih tu lun*, *Yogācārabhūmi* and *Chu ching yao chi*. Let us then see how Revival Hell is portrayed in these three texts. First, the corresponding section in the *Ta chih tu lun* is as follows. The underlined portions are those sections quoted verbatim in the *Ōjōyōshū*.

When we look at (each of) the eight great hells, the sufferings there are varied. The people who receive punishments in the Great Hell of Revival fight each other. With hatred, they attack with anger. Gripping sharp swords in their hands, they cut and skin each other. They pierce each other with halberds; they spear each other with iron-pronged spears; they club each other with iron clubs; they beat each other with iron staves; they run each other through with iron spears; and they cut each other into pieces with sharp swords. Also they grasp and tear at one another with iron claws. Each are splattered with the blood from the other's body. They are tormented by pain and writhe in agony until they lose consciousness. A refreshing wind, the result of past actions, blows. The wardens of hell call "To!" ("Hey!") to them, and the criminals revive as before. For this reason, it is called "Revival Hell." They immediately revert to their former states, and are sub-

ject to suffering again. Sentient beings in this (hell) receive these severe punishments as retribution for various acts of murder they committed as a result of their past actions, such as killing with pleasure living beings including cows, sheep, birds and wild animals, and killing and harming each other in order to obtain fields, houses, male and female slaves, wives, children, countries, land, money and wealth. (T 25, 175c)

Next, the *Yogācārabhūmi*.

Also, in the great Revival Naraka (hell), one is subject to the following extremely strict punishments and sufferings. . . . They harm and injure each other, and they writhe in agony, lose consciousness, and thrash about on the ground. Next, a great voice is heard in the sky, intoning the following words: "These sentient beings should once again revive as before. (They) should once again revive as before." These sentient beings then quickly stand up again, and thus once again they are inflicted the sufferings described above; they further harm and injure each other. For this reason, they are subject to suffering for a long time. (T 30, 295c)

Finally, the *Chu ching yao chi*.

The eight great hells are: (1) Thought, (2) Black Rope, (3) Mound, (4) Wailing, (5) Great Wailing, (6) Burning and Roasting, (7) Great Burning and Roasting, and (8) Unremitting. . . . First, the sixteen regions of the Hell of Thought. Iron claws grow on the hands of sentient beings there. With fierce anger for one another, they grasp each other until the flesh on their hands all fall off, and imagine that they are dead. For this reason (this hell) is called "Imagination." Furthermore the sentient beings there arouse the desire to harm (others) in their minds. Gripping a sword in their hands, they slash, stab, skin and mince each other until their bodies are crushed and they lie on the ground. They imagine that they are dead. A refreshing wind blows, and they again revive and stand up. They themselves imagine and say, "I have already revived. Having long received punishments, I will get out of Imagination Hell." In fear, they seek forgiveness. But before they are aware of it, they suddenly arrive at the Hell of Black Sand. . . . (T 54, 166c-7a)

All of these texts present the Revival Hell as a place where people engage in constant, bloody warfare with each other, die, revive and continue to fight as before. However, the specific details of the fighting and method of revival differ from one text to another. Confronted with this situation, Genshin selectively appropriates certain details from these texts and combines them together into his own description of this hell. However, as stated above, it is important to remember that he does not choose the description in one source text and attempt to suppress the rest. As I have mentioned above, Genshin recognized that there exists a plurality of voices concerning the nature of this hell within Buddhism.

Genshin's second strategy, that of abridgment, appears most clearly in his appropriation of passages from the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*. This sutra is quite lengthy (seventy fascicles altogether) and just the section on the hells takes up ten fascicles. Thus, even though he recognized this text as an important source for understanding the character of the hells, Genshin felt compelled to abridge the sutra when citing it in the *Ōjōyōshū*. The fact that Genshin discusses only a few of the sixteen subsidiary hells attached to each hell, even when the sutra itself provides detailed descriptions of all sixteen of them, is one example. Another example is Genshin's reworking of the story of the river of molten metal found in the Assembly Hell. Genshin describes this river as follow:

A great river is found there. Within it, there are iron hooks, all of which are aflame. The wardens of hell seize these criminals, throw them into the river and impale them on the iron hooks. Also within the river flows seething liquid of copper-gold alloy. The criminals drift in it. There are those whose bodies (have half sunk into the river) like the rising sun. There are those whose bodies have sunk like heavy stones. There are those who raise their hands to the heavens and howl and sob. There are those who huddle together and howl and sob. (Although) they are subject to such great suffering, there is no lord, no one who can save them. (T 84, 34a)

As stated above, this passage is based on the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*. However, a quick glance at the original text reveals that Genshin considerably shortened the passage when quoting it in the *Ōjōyōshū*. The original passage is as follows. (Again, the underlined portions are those sections quoted in the *Ōjōyōshū*.)

There is a great river called Burning<sup>23</sup> Iron Hooks. There are iron hooks there, all of which are aflame. Yama's henchmen grasp the people of hell, throw them into the river and impale them on the iron hooks. Also within the river are scorching swords of flames. The criminal is subject to great torment from them. His suffering is incomparable. Nothing can compare with it. That is to say, in that place he is subject to the suffering of flaming hooks, i.e., his body is hooked and beaten by the flaming hooks. Yama's henchmen seize the people of hell and place them in the river, hold them down and drown them. The people of hell drown one after another. After drowning one after another, they wail and howl and sob.

The river consists, not of water, but of seething liquid of copper-gold alloy. The criminals drift in it as if they drift in the original (water). They are carried along by the flow without stopping. In this way, (they) drift, are burned and are subject to great torment. After having been burned and having drifted down that river of iron hooks, among the people of that hell are those whose bodies (have half sunk into the river) like the rising sun; there are those whose bodies have sunk like heavy stones; there are those who cling to the river bank so they do not drown in the river. Or else there are criminals whose bodies are like clothes (floating in) the water. They are eaten by iron eagles with flaming beaks, (who eat these beings of hell) just as they would eat fish. Or their bodies melt, and their bodies are like globs of yogurt. They are beaten with iron tiles. Or else there are those whose bodies are broken into a hundred thousand pieces like fragments of tiles. There are those who are placed into a river which resembles molten copper. There are those whose bodies are burned by scorching embers. There are those who are bound with a flaming cangue. After having their bodies bound with the cangue, they are placed in scorching embers. Again, after being bound with iron cangues, some are tied together and hacked and pierced. There are those whose bodies are chopped into fine threads and pulled around and beaten. There are those whose heads are pulled down and beaten from above. There are those who are placed in a cauldron and boiled in

<sup>23</sup> Read 燒 for 饒 following footnote 5 found at T 17, 31b.

hot water in the same way that beans are boiled.<sup>24</sup> In the cauldron, there are those who bob up and down one after another or churn rapidly. There are those who are placed to one side, close to a veranda in the cauldron, and raise their hands to the heavens and howl and sob. There are those who huddle together and howl and sob. (Although) they are subject to such great suffering, there is no lord, no one who can save them. (T 17, 31b–c)

This passage contains multiple images, all similar to each other, of beings being tortured in a river. When these torments are repeated endlessly, the horror inherent in this passage is paradoxically reduced. By abridging these repetitions, Genshin has created a much tighter narrative, even while retaining the impact of the original passage.

A similar strategy of condensation can be seen in Genshin's appropriation of the next story of the tree with sharp knife-like leaves. In both the *Ōjōyōshū* and in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra*, this story immediately follows the story of the molten river above. The *Ōjōyōshū* relates this story as follows:

Furthermore, the wardens of hell take the people of hell and place them in a forest (of trees with) knife-like leaves. Looking to the top of the tree, (the hell-dweller sees that) there is an attractive, well-groomed woman adorned with jewelry. Upon seeing this, he begins to climb the tree. The leaves of the tree are like knives, and they slash the flesh of his body. They next slash his tendons. In this way, they pierce and slash his entire body. Once at the top of the tree, he sees that the woman now is on the ground. She looks up to that man with enticing eyes, and says as follows, "Because I thought of you, I came down here. Why aren't you now near me? Why won't you embrace me?"

After the criminal sees this, his desire burns fiercely, and he gradually climbs down again. (But now,) the knife-like leaves all face up. They are as sharp as razors. As before, they slash his entire body. Once he reaches the ground, that woman is again at the top of the tree. After seeing this, the criminal climbs the tree again. In this way, for ten trillion countless years, (the man is) deceived by his own mind. Within this hell, things go on in this

<sup>24</sup> Read 熟 for 熱, following footnote 10 found at T 17, 31c.

way continually. He is burned in this way. Wrong desire is the cause. (T 84, 34a)

The original passage in the *Saddharma-smṛtyupasthāna-sūtra* is like this:

Again, it is like this. Yama's henchmen take the people of hell and place them in a forest (of trees with) knife-like leaves. The knife-like leaves (on the trees) are numerous, and are all ablaze with fire. Looking to the top of the tree, the criminal (sees that) there is an attractive, well-groomed woman adorned with jewelry. Upon seeing this, he arouses extreme love and passion (towards her). This woman is adorned with an exquisite headdress. Her body is powdered with perfumed powder and her body is covered with perfumed ointment. In this way, her body is supremely adorned. Her body is extremely soft and her fingers and nails are long and slender. She smiles in joy. Her body is adorned with various jewels. She (looks at men in) various lustful ways. When they see her, the hearts of all ordinary foolish men are drawn to her. Upon seeing this well-groomed woman on top of the tree, (the hell-dweller) gives rise to this thought: "I have seen her before as a human. I have possessed her before." It is because that person of hell is deceived by his own karma that he sees (her) like this.

After seeing (her) like this, he begins to climb the tree. The leaves of the tree are like knives, and they slash the flesh of his body. Once the flesh is slashed, they next slash his tendons. Once the tendons are slashed, they slash his bones. Once the bones are slashed, they pierce his marrows. In this way, after they pierce and slash his entire body, he reaches the top of the tree, wishing to approach the woman. More and more, his mind is concentrated on this thought, but he is being deceived by his own mind.

At the top of the tree, he is subject to suffering in this way. After climbing the tree, he sees that the woman now is on the ground. After the man sees this, that woman looks up to that man with enticing eyes, and wails in a beautiful voice. First with sweet words, she says as follows, "Because I thought of you, I came down here. Why aren't you now near me? Why won't you embrace me?" Such is the work of the hellish manifestation of karma. After the criminal sees this, his desire burns fiercely, and he gradually climbs down from the top of the tree with knife-like leaves.

Once that man begins to climb down, the knife-like leaves all face up. (As before, the leaves are all) ablaze with fire. They are as sharp as razors. These sharp knives first slash his flesh. Next they sever his tendons. Next they slash his bones. Next they slash his veins. Next they slash his marrows. Scars appear all over his body. That person of hell is slashed in this way and pierced in this way. (Even after) all the veins have been severed, when he sees that woman, lust burns in his heart. Once he looks upon (her) in this way, eagles and crows<sup>25</sup> with flaming beaks peck out his eyes. The flaming knife-like leaves first slash his ears. When slashed in this way, he screams and wails. Then the flaming knife-like leaves slash his tongue and next slash his nose. In this way, they slash his entire body. (This is because) his mind is dominated by lust.

In this way he reaches the ground. Once he reaches the ground, that woman is again at the top of the tree. After seeing this, that person climbs the tree again in the same way as described above. Due to the power of his karma, (such things) continue for countless hundreds of thousands of years. In this way, for ten trillion countless years, (the man is) deceived by his own mind. Within this hell, things go on in this way continually. That person of hell is burned in this way. Why is he burned? Wrong desire is the cause.

(Even when subject to) such (torture), that person will still not cast desire aside. From beginningless time, his mind continually acts like this, and he finds himself in the realms of hell, hungry ghosts and animals. The minds of sentient beings cannot be disciplined. In hell, this is originally so. You should know that this mind cannot be trusted. (T 17, 32a–b)

Once again, the sutra is much more detailed and elaborate. Genshin's strategy is to prune the excesses of the original in order to create a more concise, powerful image. This passage vividly illustrates how Genshin abridged and shortened the original when incorporating material from his sources into his narrative.

#### IV. Conclusion: Imagining Hell in the *Ōjōyōshū*

What can we conclude about Genshin's view of hell from the analysis

<sup>25</sup> Following footnote 3 (T 15, 32a), read 鳥 for 烏.



above? In this final section, I would like to summarize some of the points I have already made above, and relate Genshin's view of hell to the historical situation of Heian Japan during which the *Ōjōyōshū* was composed.

First, Genshin appropriates the multi-faceted Buddhist textual tradition concerning hell in a creative way to construct his own image of hell. Sometimes he does this through a strategy of selection, while at other times he employs the technique of abridgment. But whatever strategy he uses, the result is a new, powerful vision of hell—one which, even while respecting its sources and recognizing that there is a plurality of images concerning hell in the Buddhist tradition, is unique to the *Ōjōyōshū*.

The second point to be noted is the important place which hell occupies in Genshin's Pure Land rhetoric. Genshin's Pure Land soteriology hinges on his contrast between the painful and unsatisfactory existence within the realm of transmigration (the Six Paths) and the transcendental bliss obtained in the Pure Land. "The Six Paths are fraught with suffering; let us seek birth in the Pure Land which is beyond all suffering"—this, in essence, is Genshin's message. Hell, of course, is the place where one encounters the worst sorts of suffering possible in the Six Paths. Thus Genshin dwells at length on the horrifying tortures of hell in order to present in most graphic terms the sufferings of the Six Paths. The aim of such terrifying descriptions is to turn the reader's mind away from this world and lead him to seek the Pure Land. In this way, Genshin's gory portrait of the sufferings of hell plays a crucial rhetorical function in his Pure Land soteriology.

The third point is closely related to the second. In his description of the hells, Genshin repeatedly argues that the torments of hell are the results of one's evil deeds in the past. Following the invariable law of karmic retribution, people receive in hell the effects of their evil actions in the present. The moral here is: if you do not want to fall into hell, reform your life and set your mind wholeheartedly to seeking birth in the Pure Land.

Finally, a word must be said about the social background of Heian Japan that led Genshin to produce such fearful portraits of hell. As scholars have long noted, the mid-Heian period was marked by far-reaching political, social and economic changes, including the breakdown of the Nara period *ritsuryō* system of centralized government, the increasing domination of the court by the Fujiwara family, the development of a money economy, the growth of an urban culture in the capital, the proliferation of tax-free estates (*shōen*) and the emergence of an increasingly powerful warrior class in the

provinces.<sup>26</sup> The widespread social dislocation these changes engendered led to new developments within the field of religion, such as the rise of cults centered on the *goryō* (vengeful spirits) and other popular deities, the growth of the notion of religious pollution and the rise of beliefs in portents and, finally, the growth of Pure Land Buddhism.<sup>27</sup> The portrait of hell in the *Ōjōyōshū* reflects the profound spiritual anxiety that characterized this age. In such climate, people were acutely aware that they were fully capable of acting in immoral ways and could unquestioningly accept that these deeds would have serious consequences in the future. The hells as described in the *Ōjōyōshū* must have appeared very real to these people. And it is because they accepted the reality of these hells that they could single-mindedly seek birth into Amida Buddha's Pure Land in the next lifetime.

<sup>26</sup> Ishimoda Shō 石母田 正, *Chūseiteki sekai no keisei* 中世的世界の形成 [The Formation of the Medieval World]. (Reprint, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1985), 340.

<sup>27</sup> Taira Masayuki 平 雅行, *Nihon chūsei no shakai to Bukkyō* 日本中世の社会と仏教 [Society and Buddhism in Medieval Japan]. (Tokyo: Hanawa Shobō, 1992), 65–66.